

Oakman Boulevard Historic District

General boundaries: Linwood, Davison, Oakman Ct. and Oakman Blvd.

Local √ 10/6/89
State
State Marker
National



2600-2700 block of Oakman Boulevard streetscape.

Historic overview:

The development of Oakman Boulevard was a result of Detroit's industrial boom at the turn of the century. As the industrial plants grew, the city boundaries were pushed farther out, and the need for transportation and homes for the workers increased. City officials had discussed an outer boulevard since the creation of Grand Boulevard, but were not ready to act on the plan. Detroit's outer boulevard became the undertaking of realtor and land developer Robert Oakman. In 1916, Oakman purchased a tract of land outside the city limits for this purpose.

When news of Oakman's plan for a boulevard reached the papers, newsstands were besieged by real estate operators and prospective investors all wanting to be a part of the development. Oakman staked his entire fortune on the project; soon other investors followed. However, when his largest investor pulled out, Oakman approached his good friends John and Horace Dodge, who immediately gave him \$225,000 to begin the project. The road was initially called Ford Highway because the vast subdivision was to stretch from the Ford plant in Highland Park to the Ford plant at River Rouge. The name was later changed to Oakman Highway and later Oakman Boulevard.

Since its inception Oakman Boulevard has been considered a fashionable place to live for Detroit's upper middle class. One of the unique features of Oakman Boulevard was the number of imported trees from around the world. His plan was to have these trees catalogued so that students wishing to study them could do so. By 1923 Oakman had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on beautification. Oakman Boulevard remains one of Detroit's most prominent thoroughfares, representing the city's residential and industrial expansion of the 1920s.

